

Tribute to Rabbi Morley Feinstein
May 11, 2012

Shabbat Shalom. Thank you for inviting me to join you on this special occasion marking the 10th anniversary of Rabbi Feinstein's installation as the Rabbi here at the University Synagogue.

As all of you know, Rabbi Feinstein is known not only for his scholarship, but also for his warmth. It is a spirit felt by everyone from the littlest children in the synagogue pre-school on up.

I have had the chance to see Rabbi Feinstein in action when he has accompanied the synagogue's confirmation class to Washington, DC. It is a trip to turn Jewish ethics into action and lobby Congress on key social justice issues. Rabbi Feinstein is no bystander from the pulpit, he is engaged in the community as a role model, a mentor and a mensch.

With a “Rabbi Award” from the LA Jewish Federation, senior positions on the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, and a Divinity doctorate from the HUC, his leadership is recognized by his peers.

As an author and an educator, he is looked to for his expertise in topics ranging from medical ethics to biblical commentary and Holocaust education. He’s also a celebrated musician.

When Rabbi Freehling stepped down after 30 years at University Synagogue, he left big shoes to fill. I’m sure there were some who wondered if a Rabbi coming from a small town like Southbend, Indiana could keep up with the pace of a buzzing Southcoast synagogue.

But truly, Rabbi Feinstein was coming home. He was born and raised here in Los Angeles. He was ordained by HUC. And tonight we pay tribute to the vibrant and energized atmosphere he has continued to cultivate here at University Synagogue. As a community you have much to be proud of.

This is a synagogue that is known for its inclusiveness and its outreach to Jewish families of all stripes. It is a congregation comprised of members that look out for each other and are known for taking leadership roles in service to the greater Los Angeles community as well.

A core tenet of Judaism is that no one is left behind – the widow, the orphan, the stranger – they are all taken care of. We believe in the importance of a safety net.

It is a value held dearly by this congregation and its “mitzvah corps,” which organizes visits to sick community members, meals for new parents, and support groups for those facing cancer and other life challenges.

It is a value that inspires my own work in Congress to defend programs like Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security and the Affordable Care Act - programs that ensure that seniors and low-income families are not left behind in our society because of an illness or a disability.

Another Jewish value that infuses this congregation is Tikkun Olam, the belief that as Jews we have a responsibility to improve the imperfections in the world around us. When I look at the beautiful renovations the synagogue has done in recent years, I fully appreciate the “green” designs to increase energy efficiency and reduce the building’s carbon footprint.

As a champion of legislation to address the grave risk of climate change, I thank you. I see it as an environmental imperative, an economic imperative, but also a moral imperative. I appreciate this congregation’s commitment to “climate justice.”

University Synagogue is a remarkable place, and in Rabbi Feinstein you have a remarkable Rabbi.

This is the time of year when the Jewish community counts the “omer,” a 7-week period that starts on the second day of Passover and ends with the start of Shavuot. It marks the journey the Jewish people undertook from the moment they left Egypt until the moment they stood before Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

While the Jews leaving Egypt had the miracles of the Exodus to sustain their faith, they still needed Moses to lead them on that journey through the wilderness. They still needed someone to inspire them. They needed a leader.

Every congregation needs a leader to inspire them. This synagogue is blessed to have Rabbi Feinstein and Cantor Frailich and Rabbi Simonds.

On this special anniversary, I thank you Rabbi Feinstein for your leadership at University Synagogue, in the greater community, and beyond.

I congratulate you and your wife and your children on this special tribute, and I hope that this congregation and its supporters can look forward to many more years with you at the helm.

Thank you and Shabbat Shalom.